

# An Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark

Robert Owen

1816

*Dedicated to those who have no private ends to accomplish, who are honestly in search of truth, for the purpose of ameliorating the conditions of society, and who have the firmness to follow the truth wherever it may lead, without being turned aside from the pursuit by the prepossessions or prejudices of any part of mankind.*

*Delivered on the opening of the Institute for the Formation of Character on the 1st of January, 1816.*

We have met to-day for the purpose of opening this Institution; and it is my intention to explain to you the objects for Which it has been founded.

These objects are most important.

The first relates to the immediate comfort and benefit of all the inhabitants of this village.

The second, to the welfare and advantage of the neighbourhood.

The third, to extensive ameliorations throughout the British dominions.

The last, to the gradual improvement of every nation in the world.

I will briefly explain how this Institution is to contribute towards producing these effects.

Long before I came to reside among you, it had been my chief study to discover the extent, causes, and remedy of the inconveniences and miseries which were perpetually recurring to every class in society.

The history of man informed me that innumerable attempts had been made, through every age, to lessen these evils; and experience convinced me that the present generation, stimulated by an accession of knowledge derived from past times, was eagerly engaged in the same pursuit. My mind at a very early period took a similar direction; and I became ardently desirous of investigating to its source a subject which involved the happiness of every human being.

It soon appeared to me, that the only path to knowledge on this subject had been neglected; that one leading in an opposite direction had alone been followed; that while causes existed to compel mankind to pursue such direction, it was idle to expect any successful result: and experience proves how vain their pursuit has been.

In this inquiry, men have hitherto been directed by their inventive faculties, and have almost entirely disregarded the only guide that can lead to true knowledge on any subject — experience. They have been governed, in the most important concerns of life, by mere illusions of the imagination, in direct opposition to existing facts.

Having satisfied myself beyond doubt with regard to this fundamental error; having traced the ignorance and misery which it has inflicted on man, by a calm and patient investigation of the causes which have continued this evil, without any intermission from one generation to another; and having also maturely reflected on the obstacles to be overcome, before a new direction can be given to the human mind; I was induced to form the resolution of devoting my life to relieve mankind from this mental disease and all its miseries.

It was evident to me that the evil was universal; that, in practice, none was in the right path—no, not one; and that, in order to remedy the evil, a different one must be pursued. That the whole man must be re-formed on fundamental principles the very reverse of those in which he had been trained; in short, that the minds of all men must be born again, and their knowledge and practice commence on a new foundation.

Satisfied of the futility of the existing modes of instruction, and of the errors of the existing modes of government, I was well convinced that none of them could ever effect the ends intended; but that, on the contrary, they were only calculated to defeat all the objects which human instructors and governors had proposed to attain.

I found, on such a patient consideration of the subject as its importance demanded, that to reiterate precept upon precept, however excellent in theory, while no decisive measures were adopted to place mankind under circumstances in which it might be possible to put those precepts in practice, was but a waste of time. I therefore determined to form arrangements preparatory to the introduction of truths, the knowledge of which should dissipate the errors and evils of all the existing political and religious systems.

Be not alarmed at the magnitude of the attempt which this declaration opens to your view. Each change, as it occurs, will establish a substantial and permanent good, unattended by any counteracting evil; nor can the mind of man, formed on the old system, longer interpose obstacles capable of retarding the progress of those truths which I am now about to unfold to you. The futile attempts which ignorance may for a short time oppose to them, will be found to accelerate their introduction. As soon as they shall be comprehended in all their bearings, every one will be compelled to acknowledge them, to see their benefits in practice to himself and to each of his fellow creatures; for, by this system, none, no not one, will be injured. It is a delightful thought, an animating reflection, a stimulus to the steady prosecution of my purpose, beyond—nay, far beyond—all that riches, and honour, and praise can bestow, to be conscious of the possibility of being instrumental in introducing a practical system into society, the complete establishment of which *shall give happiness to every human being through all succeeding generations*. And such I declare was the sole motive that gave rise to this Institution, and to all my proceedings.

To effect any permanently beneficial change in society, I found it was far more necessary to act than to speak. I tried the effect of the new principles on a limited scale in the southern part of the island. The result exceeded my most sanguine anticipations; and I became anxious for a more enlarged field of action. I saw New Lanark: it possessed many of the local circumstances proper for my purpose; and this establishment became at my disposal. This event, as many of you may recollect, occurred upwards of sixteen years ago. Sixteen years of action is not a short period: extensive changes are the result. You have been witnesses of my proceedings here, from the time I undertook the direction of the establishment to the present hour. I now ask, and I will thank you to make either a public or a private reply,—have any of you discovered even *one* of my measures that was not clearly and decisively intended to benefit the whole population? But I am satisfied that you are all now convinced of this truth. You also know some of the obstacles which

were opposed to my progress; but you know not a tithe of them. Yet, after all, these obstacles have been few, compared with those which I expected and was prepared to meet; and which I trust I should have overcome.

When I examined the circumstances under which I found you, they appeared to me to be very similar to those of other manufacturing districts; except with regard to the boarding-house, which contained the young children who were procured from the public charities of the country. That part of the establishment was under an admirable arrangement, and was a strong indication of the genuine and extensive benevolence of the revered and truly good man (the late David Dale of Glasgow) who founded these works and this village. His wishes and intentions towards you all were those of a father towards his children. You knew him and his worth; and his memory must be deeply engraven upon your hearts. Little indeed could he be conscious, when he laid the first stone of this establishment, that he was commencing a work, from whence not only the amelioration of his suffering countrymen should proceed, but the means of happiness be developed to every nation in the world.

I have stated that I found the population of this place similar to that of other manufacturing districts. It was, with some exceptions, existing in poverty, crime, and misery; and strongly; prejudiced, as most people are at first, against any change that might be proposed. The usual mode of proceeding on the principles which have hitherto governed the conduct of men, would have been to punish those who committed the crimes,) and to be highly displeased with every one who opposed the alterations that were intended for his benefit. The principles, however, upon which the new system is founded, lead to a very different conduct. They make it evident, that when men are' in poverty,—when they commit crimes or actions injurious to themselves and others,—and when they are in a state of wretchedness,—there must be substantial causes for these lamentable effects; and that, instead of punishing or being angry with our fellow-men because they have been subjected to such a miserable existence, we ought to pity and commiserate them, and patiently to trace the causes whence the evils proceed, and endeavour to discover whether they may not be removed.

This was the course which I adopted. I sought not the punishment of any delinquent, nor felt anger at your conduct in opposition to your own good; and when apparently stern and decisive, I was not actuated by a single feeling of irritation against any individual. I dispassionately investigated the source of the evils with which I saw you afflicted. The immediate causes of them were soon obvious; nor were the remote ones, or the causes of those causes, long hid from me.

I found that those which principally produced your misery, were practices you had been permitted to acquire—of falsehood, of theft, of drunkenness, of injustice in your transactions, want of charity for the opinions of others, and mistaken notions, in which you had been instructed, as to the superiority of your religious opinions, and that these were calculated to produce more happiness than any of the opinions impressed on the minds of an infinitely more numerous part of mankind. I found, also, that these causes were but the effects of others; and that those others might all be traced to the ignorance in which our forefathers existed, and in which we ourselves have continued to this day.

But from this day a change must take place; a new era must commence; the human intellect, through the whole extent of the earth, hitherto enveloped by the grossest ignorance and superstition, must begin to be released from its state of darkness; nor shall nourishment henceforth be given to the seeds of disunion and division among men. For the time is come, when the means may be prepared to train all the nations of the world—men of every colour and climate, of the

most diversified habits—in that knowledge which shall impel them not only to love but to be actively kind to each other in the whole of their conduct, without a single exception. I speak not an unmeaning jargon of words, but -that which I know—that which has been derived from a cool and dispassionate examination and comparison, during a quarter of a century, of the facts which exist around us. And, however averse men may be to resign their early-taught prejudices, I pledge myself to prove, to the entire satisfaction of the world, the truth of all that I have stated and all that I mean to state. Nay, such is my confidence in the truth of the principles on which the system tam about to introduce is founded, that I hesitate not to assert their power heartily to incline all men to say, “This system is assuredly true, and therefore eminently calculated to realize those invaluable precepts of the Gospel—universal charity, goodwill, and peace among men. Hitherto we must have been trained in error; and we hail it as the harbinger of that period when our swords shall be turned into ploughshares, and our spears into pruning-hooks; when universal love and benevolence shall prevail; when there shall be but one language and one nation; and when fear of want or of any evil among men shall be known no more.”

Acting, although unknown to you, uniformly and steadily upon this system, my attention was ever directed to remove, as I could prepare means for their removal, such of the immediate causes as were perpetually creating misery amongst you, and which, if permitted to remain, would to this day have continued to create misery. I therefore withdrew the most prominent incitements to falsehood, theft, drunkenness, and other pernicious habits, with which many of you were then familiar: and in their stead I introduced other causes, which were intended to produce better external habits; and better external habits have been introduced. I say better external habits; for to these alone have my proceedings hitherto been intended to apply. What has yet been done I consider as merely preparatory.

This Institution, when all its parts shall be completed, is intended to produce permanently beneficial effects; and, instead of longer applying temporary expedients for correcting some of your most prominent external habits, to effect a complete and thorough improvement in the internal as well as external character of the whole village. For this purpose the Institution has been devised to afford the means of receiving your children at an early age, as soon almost as they can walk. By this means many of you, mothers of families, will be enabled to earn a better maintenance or support for your children; you will have less care and anxiety about them; while the children will be prevented from acquiring any bad habits, and gradually prepared to learn the best.

The middle room of the story below will be appropriated to their accommodation; and in this their chief occupation will be to play and amuse themselves in severe weather: at other times they will be permitted to occupy the enclosed area before the building; for, to give children a vigorous constitution, they ought to be kept as much as possible in the open air. As they advance in years, they will be taken into the rooms on the right and left, where they will be regularly instructed in the rudiments of common learning; which, before they shall be six years old, they may be taught in a superior manner.

These stages may be called the first and second preparatory schools: and when your children shall have passed through I them, they will be admitted into this place (intended also to be used as a chapel), which, with the adjoining apartment, is to be the general schoolroom for reading, writing, arithmetic, sewing, and knitting; all which, on the plan to be pursued, will be accomplished to a considerable extent by the time the children are ten years old; before which age, none of them will be permitted to enter the works.

For the benefit of the health and spirits of the children both boys and girls will be taught to dance, and the boys will be instructed in military exercises; those of each sex who may have good voices will be taught to sing, and those among the boys who have a taste for music will be taught to play upon some instrument; for it is intended to give them as much diversified innocent amusement as the local circumstances of the establishment will admit.

The rooms to the east and west on the story below, will also be appropriated in bad weather for relaxation and exercise during some part of the day, to the children who, in the regular hours of teaching, are to be instructed in these apartments.

In this manner is the Institution to be occupied during the day in winter. In summer, it is intended that they shall derive knowledge from a personal examination of the works of nature and of art, by going out frequently with some of their masters into the neighbourhood and country around.

After the instruction of the children who are too young to attend the works shall have been finished for the day, the apartments shall be cleaned, ventilated, and in winter lighted and heated, and in all respects made comfortable, for the reception of other classes of the population. The apartments on this floor are then to be appropriated for the use of the children and youth of both sexes who have been employed at work during the day, and who may wish still further to improve themselves in reading, writing, arithmetic, sewing, or knitting; or to learn any of the useful arts: to instruct them in which, proper masters and mistresses, who are appointed, will attend for two hours every evening.

The three lower rooms, which in winter will also be well lighted and properly heated, will be thrown open for the use of the adult part of the population, who are to be provided with every accommodation requisite to enable them to read, write, account, sew, or play, converse, or walk about. But strict order and attention to the happiness of every one of the party will be enforced, until such habits shall be acquired as will render any formal restriction unnecessary; and the measures thus adopted will soon remove such necessity.

Two evenings in the week will be appropriated to dancing and music: but on these occasions every accommodation will be prepared for those who prefer to study or to follow any of the occupations pursued on the other evenings.

One of the apartments will also be occasionally appropriated for the purpose of giving useful instruction to the older classes of the inhabitants. For, believe me, my friends, -you are yet very deficient with regard to the best modes of training your children, or of arranging your domestic concerns; as well as in that wisdom which is requisite to direct your conduct towards each other, so as to enable you to become greatly more happy than you have ever yet been. There will be no difficulty in teaching you what is right and proper; your own interests will afford ample stimulus for that purpose; but the real and only difficulty will be to unlearn those pernicious habits and sentiments which, an infinite variety of causes, existing through all past ages, have combined to impress upon your minds and bodies, so as to make you imagine that they are inseparable from your nature. It shall, however, ere long be proved to you, that in this respect, as well as in many others, you and all mankind are mistaken. Yet think not, from what I have said, that I mean to infringe, even in the most slight degree, on the liberty of private judgment or religious opinions. No! they have hitherto been unrestrained; and the most effectual measures have been adopted by all the parties interested in the concern, to secure to you these most invaluable privileges. And here I now publicly declare (and while I make the declaration I wish my voice could extend to the ear, and make its due impression on the mind, of every one of our fellow-creatures), "that the

individual who first placed restraint on private judgment and religious opinions, was the author of hypocrisy, and the origin of innumerable evils which mankind through every past age have experienced." The right, however, of private judgment, and of real religious liberty, is nowhere yet enjoyed. It is not possessed by any nation in the world; and thence the unnecessary ignorance, as well as endless misery, of all. Nor can this right be enjoyed until the principle whence opinions originate shall be universally known and acknowledged.

The chief object of my existence will be to make this knowledge universal, and thence to bring the right of private judgment into general practice; to show the infinitely beneficial consequences that will result to mankind from its adoption. To effect this important purpose is a part, and an essential part, of that system which is about to be introduced.

I proceed to show how the Institution is to contribute to the welfare and advantage of this neighbourhood.

It will be readily admitted, that a population trained in regular habits of temperance, industry, and sobriety; of genuine charity for the opinions of all mankind, founded on the only knowledge that can implant true charity in the breast of any human being; trained also in a sincere desire to do good to the utmost of their power, and without any exception, to every one of their fellow creatures, cannot, even by their example alone, do otherwise than materially increase the welfare and advantages of the neighbourhood in which such a population may be situated. To feel the due weight of this consideration, only imagine to yourselves 2,000 or 3,000 human beings trained in habits of licentiousness, and allowed to remain in gross ignorance. How much, in such a case, would not the peace, quiet, comfort, and happiness of the neighbourhood be destroyed ! But there is not anything I have done, or purpose to do, which is not intended to benefit my fellow-creatures to the greatest extent that my operations can embrace. I wish to benefit all equally; but circumstances limit my present measures for the public good within a narrow circle. I must begin to act at some point; and a combination of singular events has fixed that point at this establishment. The first and greatest advantages will therefore centre here. But, in unison with the principle thus stated, it has ever been my intention that as this Institution, when completed, will accommodate more than the children of parents resident at the village, any persons living at Lanark, or in the neighbourhood anywhere around, who cannot well afford to educate their children, shall be at liberty, on mentioning their wishes, to send them to this place, where they will experience the same care and attention as those who belong to the establishment. Nor will there be any distinction made between the children of those parents who are deemed the worst, and of those who may be esteemed the best, members of society: rather, indeed, would I prefer to receive the offspring of the worst, if they shall be sent at an early age; because they really require more of our care and pity; and by well training these, society will be more essentially benefited, than if the like attention were paid to those whose parents are educating them in comparatively good habits. The system now preparing, and which will ultimately be brought into full practice, is to effect a complete change in all our sentiments and conduct towards those poor miserable creatures whom the errors of past times have denominated the bad, the worthless, and the wicked. A more enlarged and better knowledge of human nature will make it evident that, in strict justice, those who apply these terms to their fellow-men are not only the most ignorant, but are themselves the immediate causes of more misery in the world than those whom they call the outcasts of society. *They* are, therefore, correctly speaking, the most wicked and worthless; and were they not grossly deceived, and rendered blind from infancy, they would become conscious of the lamentably extensive evils, which, by their well-intended but most mistaken conduct, they

have, during so long a period, inflicted on their fellow-men. But the veil of darkness must be removed from their eyes; their erroneous proceedings must be made so palpable that they shall thenceforth reject them with horror. Yes! they will reject with horror even those notions which hitherto they have from infancy been taught to value beyond price.

To that which follows I wish to direct the attention of all your faculties. I am about to declare to you the cause and the cure of that which is called wickedness in your fellow-men. As we proceed, instead of your feelings being roused to hate and to pursue them to punishment, you will be compelled to pity them; to commiserate their condition; nay, to love them, and to be convinced that to this day they have been treated unkindly, unjustly, and with the greatest cruelty. It is indeed high time, my friends, that our conduct—that the conduct of all mankind, in this respect, should be the very reverse of what it has been; and of this truth, new as it may and must appear to many of you, you shall, as I proceed, be satisfied to the most complete conviction.

That, then, which has been hitherto called wickedness in our fellow-men has proceeded from one of two distinct causes, or from some combination of those causes. They are what is termed bad or wicked—

First,—Because they are born with faculties and propensities which render them more liable, under the circumstances, than other men, to commit such actions as are usually denominated wicked. Or—

Second,—Because they have been placed, by birth or by other events, in particular countries; have been influenced from infancy by parents, playmates, and others; and have been surrounded by those circumstances which gradually and necessarily trained them in the habits and sentiments called wicked. Or—

Third,—They have become wicked in consequence of some particular combination of these causes.

Let us now examine them separately, and endeavour to discover whether any, and which of them, have originated with the individuals; and, of course, for which of them they ought to be treated by their fellow-men in the manner those denominated wicked have to this day been treated.

You have not, I trust, been rendered so completely insane, by the ignorance of our forefathers, as to imagine that the poor helpless infant, devoid of understanding, made itself, or any of its bodily or mental faculties or qualities: but, whatever you may have been taught, it is a fact, that every infant has received all its faculties and qualities, bodily and mental, from a power and cause, over which the infant had not the shadow of control.

Shall it, then, be unkindly treated? And, when it shall be grown up, shall it be punished with loss of liberty or life, because a power over which it had no control whatever, formed it in the womb with faculties and qualities different from those of its fellows?—Has the infant any means of deciding who, or of what description, shall be its parents, its playmates, or those from whom it shall derive its habits and its sentiments?—Has it the power to determine for itself whether it shall first see light within the circle of Christendom; or whether it shall be so placed as inevitably to become a disciple of Moses, of Confucius, of Mahomed; a worshipper of the great idol Juggernaut, or a savage and a cannibal?

If then, my friends, not even one of these great leading and overwhelming circumstances can be, in the smallest degree, under the control of the infant, is there a being in existence, possessing any claim even to the smallest degree of rationality, who will maintain that any individual, formed and placed under such circumstances, ought to be punished, or in any respect unkindly treated?

When men shall be in some degree relieved from the mental malady with which they have been so long afflicted, and sound judgment shall take the place of wild and senseless imagination, then the united voice of mankind shall say, "No!" And they will be astonished that a contrary supposition should ever have prevailed.

If it should be asked,—Whence, then, have wickedness and misery proceeded? I reply, *Solely from the ignorance of our forefathers!* It is this ignorance, my friends, that has been, and continues to be, the only cause of all the miseries which men have experienced. This is the evil spirit which has had dominion over the world,—which has sown the seeds of hatred and disunion among all nations,—which has grossly deceived mankind, by introducing notions the most absurd and unaccountable respecting faith and belief; notions by which it has effectually placed a seal on all the rational faculties of man,—by which numberless evil passions are engendered,—by which all men, in the most senseless manner, are not only made enemies to each other, but enemies to their own happiness! While this ignorance of our forefathers continues to abuse the world, under any name whatever, it is neither more nor less than a species of madness—rank insanity—to imagine that we can ever become in practice good, wise, or happy.

Were it not, indeed, for the positive evils which proceed from these senseless notions, they are too absurd to admit of a serious refutation; nor would any refutation be necessary, if they did not from infancy destroy the reasoning faculties of men, whether Pagans, Jews, Christians, or Mahomedans; and render them utterly incompetent to draw a just conclusion from the numberless facts which perpetually present themselves to notice. Do we not learn from history, that infants through all past ages have been taught the language, habits, and sentiments of those by whom they have been surrounded? That they had no means whatever of giving to themselves the power to acquire any others? That every generation has thought and acted like preceding generations, *with such changes only as the events around it, from which experience is derived, may have forced upon it?* And, above all, are we not conscious that the experience of every individual now existing is abundantly sufficient, on reflection, to prove to himself that he has no more power or command over his faith and belief than he possesses over the winds of heaven? nay, that his constitution is so formed, that in every instance whatsoever, the faith or belief which he possesses has been given to him by causes over which he had no control?

Experience, my friends, now makes these conclusions clear as the sun at noonday. Why, then, shall we not instantly act upon them? Having discovered our error, why shall we longer afflict our fellow-men with the evils which these wild notions have generated? Have they ever been productive of one benefit to mankind? Have they not produced, through all past ages—are they not at this moment engendering, every conceivable evil to which man, in very nation of the world, is subjected? Yes; these alone prevent the introduction of charity and universal goodwill among men. These alone prevent men from discovering the true and only road which can lead to happiness. Once overcome these obstacles, and the apple of discord will be withdrawn from among us; the whole human race may then, with the greatest ease, be trained in one mind; all their efforts may then be trained to act for the good of the whole. In short, when these great errors shall be removed, all our evil passions will disappear; no ground of anger or displeasure from one human being towards another will remain; the period of the supposed Millennium will commence, and universal love prevail.

Will it not, then, tend to the welfare and advantage of this neighbourhood, to introduce into it such a practical system as shall gradually withdraw the causes of anger, hatred, discord, and every evil passion, and substitute true and genuine principles of universal charity and of never-varying



kindness, of love without dissimulation, and of an ever-active desire to benefit to the full extent of our faculties all our fellow-creatures, whatever may be their sentiments and their habits,—wholly regardless whether they be Pagans, Jews, Christians, or Mahomedans? For anything short of this can proceed only from the evil spirit of ignorance, which is truly the roaring lion going about seeking whom he may devour.

We now come to the third division of the subject, which was to show that one of the objects of this Institution was to effect extensive ameliorations throughout the British dominions. This will be accomplished in two ways—

First,—By showing to the master manufacturers an example in practice, on a scale sufficiently extensive, of the mode by which the characters and situation of the working manufacturers whom they employ may be very materially improved, not only without injury to the masters, but so as to create to them also great and substantial advantages.

Second,—By inducing, through this example, the British legislature to – enact such laws as will secure similar benefits to every part of our population.

The extent of the benefits which may be produced by proper legislative measures, few are yet prepared to form any adequate idea of. By legislative measures I do not mean any party proceeding whatever. Those to which I allude are,—laws to diminish and ultimately prevent the most prominent evils to which the working classes are now subjected,—laws to prevent a large part of our fellow-subjects, under the manufacturing system, from being oppressed by a much smaller part,—to prevent more than one-half of our population from being trained in gross ignorance, and their valuable labour from being most injuriously directed,—laws to prevent the same valuable part of our population from being perpetually surrounded by temptations, which they have not been trained to resist, and which compel them to commit actions most hurtful to themselves and to society. The principles on which these measures are to be founded being once fairly and honestly understood, they will, be easy of adoption; and the benefits to be derived from them in practice to every member of the community, will exceed any calculation that can be made by those not well versed in political economy.

These are some of the ameliorations which I trust this Institution will be the means of obtaining for our suffering fellow-subjects.

But, my friends, if what has been done, what is doing, and what has yet to be done here, should procure the benefits which I have imperfectly enumerated, to this village, to our neighbourhood, and to our country, only, I should be greatly disappointed; for I feel an ardent desire to benefit all my fellow-men equally. I know not any distinction whatever. Political or religious parties or sects are everywhere the fruitful sources of disunion and irritation. My aim is therefore to withdraw the germ of all party from society. As little do I admit of the divisions and distinctions created by any imaginary lines which separate nation from nation. Will any being, entitled to the epithet intelligent, say that a mountain, a river, an ocean, or any shade of colour, or difference of climate, habits, and sentiments, affords a reason sufficient to satisfy the inquiries of even a well-trained child, why one portion of mankind should be taught to despise, hate, and destroy another? Are these absurd effects of the grossest ignorance never to be brought to a termination? Are we still to preserve and encourage the continuance of those errors which must inevitably make man an enemy to man? Are these the measures calculated to bring about that promised period when the lion shall lie down with the lamb, and when uninterrupted peace shall universally prevail?—peace, founded on a sincere goodwill, instilled from infancy into the very constitution of every man, which is the only basis on which universal happiness can ever be established? I look,

however, with the utmost confidence to the arrival of such a period; and, if proper measures shall be adopted, its date is not far distant.

What ideas individuals may attach to the term Millennium I know not; but I know that society may be formed so as to exist without crime, without poverty, with health greatly improved, with little, if any, misery, and with intelligence and happiness increased a hundred-fold; and no obstacle whatsoever intervenes at this moment, except ignorance, to prevent such a state of society from becoming universal.

I am aware, to the fullest extent, what various impressions these declarations will make on the different religious, political, learned, commercial, and other circles which compose the population of our empire. I know the particular shade of prejudice through which they will be presented to the minds of each of these. And to none will they appear through a denser medium than to the learned, who have been taught to suppose that the book of knowledge has been exclusively opened to them; while, in fact, they have only wasted their strength in wandering through endless mazes of error. They are totally ignorant of human nature. They are full of theories, and have not the most distant conception of what may or may not be accomplished in practice. It is true their minds have been well stored with language, which they can readily use to puzzle and confound the unlettered and inexperienced. But to those who have had an opportunity of examining the utmost extent of their acquirements, and of observing how far they have been taught, and where their knowledge terminates, the deception vanishes, and the fallacy of the foundation upon which the superstructure of all their acquirements has been raised, at once becomes most obvious. In short, with a few exceptions, their profound investigations have been about words only. For, as the principle which they have been taught, and on which all their subsequent instruction proceeds, is erroneous, so it becomes impossible that they can arrive at just conclusions. The learned have ever looked for the cause of human sentiments and actions in the individual through whom those sentiments and actions become visible,—and hitherto the learned have governed the opinions of the world. The individual has been praised, blamed, or punished according to the whims and fancies of this class of men, and, in consequence, the earth has been full charged with their ever-varying absurdities, and with the miseries which these absurdities hourly create. Had it not been a law of our nature, that any impression, however ridiculous and absurd, and however contrary to fact, may be given in infancy, so as to be tenaciously retained through life, men could not have passed through the previous ages of the world without discovering the gross errors in which they had been trained. They could not have persevered in making each other miserable, and filling the world with horrors of every description. No ! they would long since have discovered the natural, easy, and simple means of giving happiness to themselves and to every human being. But that law of nature which renders it difficult to eradicate our early instruction, although it will ultimately prove highly beneficial to the human race, serves now but to give permanence to error, and to blind our judgments. For the present situation of all the inhabitants of the earth may be compared to that of one whose eyes have been closely bandaged from infancy; who has afterwards been taught to imagine that he clearly sees the form or colour of every object around him; and who has been continually flattered with this notion, so as to compel his implicit belief in the supposition, and render him impenetrable to every attempt that could be made to undeceive him. If such be the present situation of man, how shall the illusion under which he exists be withdrawn from his mind? To beings thus circumstanced, what powers of persuasion can be applied, to make them comprehend their misfortune, and manifest to them the extent of the darkness in which they exist? In what language and in what manner shall

the attempt be made? Will not every such attempt irritate and increase the malady, until means shall be devised to unloose the bandage, and thus effectually remove the cause of this mental blindness? Your minds have been so completely enveloped by this dense covering, which has intercepted the approach of every ray of light, that were an angel from heaven to descend and declare your state, you would not, because so circumstanced you could not, believe him.

Causes, over which I could have no control, removed in my early days the bandage which covered my mental sight. If I have been enabled to discover this blindness with which my fellow-men are afflicted, to trace their wanderings from the path which they were most anxious to find, and at the same time to perceive that relief could not be administered to them by any premature disclosure of their unhappy state, it is not from any merit of mine; nor can I claim any personal consideration whatever for having been myself relieved from this unhappy situation. But, beholding such truly pitiable objects around me, and witnessing the misery which they hourly experienced from falling into the dangers and evils by which, in these paths, they were on every side surrounded,—could I remain an idle spectator? Could I tranquilly see my fellowmen walking like idiots in every imaginable direction, except that alone in which the happiness they were in search of could be found?

No! The causes which fashioned me in the womb,—the circumstances by which I was surrounded from my birth, and over which I had no influence whatever, formed me with far other faculties, habits, and sentiments. These gave me a mind that could not rest satisfied without trying every possible expedient to relieve my fellow-men from their wretched situation, and formed it of such a texture that obstacles of the most formidable nature served but to increase my ardour, and to fix within me a settled determination, either to overcome them, or to die in the attempt.

But the attempt has been made. In my progress the most multiplied difficulties, which to me at a distance seemed almost appalling, and which to others seemed absolutely insurmountable, have on their nearer approach diminished, until, at length, I have lived to see them disappear, like the fleeting clouds of morning, which prove but the harbingers of an animating and cheering day.

Hitherto I have not been disappointed in any of the expectations which I had formed. The events which have yet occurred far exceed my most sanguine anticipations, and my future course now appears evident and straightforward. It is no longer necessary that I should silently and alone exert myself for your benefit and the happiness of mankind. The period is arrived when I may call numbers to my aid, and the call will not be in vain. I well knew the danger which would arise from a premature and abrupt attempt to tear off the many-folded bandages of ignorance, which kept society in darkness. I have therefore been many years engaged, in a manner imperceptible to the public, in gently and gradually removing one fold after another of these fatal bands, from the mental eyes of those who have the chief influence in society. The principles on which the practical system I contemplate is to be founded, are now familiar to some of the leading men of all sects and parties in this country, and to many of the governing powers in Europe and America. They have been submitted to the examination of the most celebrated universities in Europe. They have been subjected to the minute scrutiny of the most learned and acute minds formed on the old system, and I am fully satisfied of their inability to disprove them. These principles I will shortly state.

Every society which exists at present, as well as every society; which history records, has been formed and governed on a belief in the following notions, assumed as first principles:

First,—That it is in the power of every individual to form his own character. Hence the various systems called by the name of religion, codes of law, and punishments. Hence also the angry passions entertained by individuals and nations towards each other.

Second,—That the affections are at the command of the individual. Hence insincerity and degradation of character. Hence the miseries of domestic life, and more than one-half of all the crimes of mankind.

Third,—That it is necessary that a large portion of mankind should exist in ignorance and poverty, in order to secure to the remaining part such a degree of happiness as they now enjoy.

Hence a system of counteraction in the pursuits of men, a general opposition among individuals to the interests of each other, and the necessary effects of such a system,—ignorance, poverty, and vice.

Facts prove, however—

First,—That character is universally formed for, and not by, the individual.

Second,—That any habits and sentiments may be given to mankind.

Third,—That the affections are not under the control of the individual.

Fourth,—That every individual may be trained to produce far more than he can consume, while there is a sufficiency of soil left for him to cultivate.

Fifth,—That nature has provided means by which population may be at all times maintained in the proper state to give the greatest happiness to every individual, without one check of vice or misery.

Sixth,—That any community may be arranged, on a due combination of the foregoing principles, in such a manner, as not only to withdraw vice, poverty, and, in a great degree, misery, from the world, but also to place every individual under circumstances in which he shall enjoy more permanent happiness than can be given to any individual under the principles which have hitherto regulated society.

Seventh,—That all the assumed fundamental principles on which society has hitherto been founded are erroneous, and may be demonstrated to be contrary to fact. And—

Eighth,—That the change which would follow the abandonment of those erroneous maxims which bring misery into the world, and the adoption of principles of truth, unfolding a system which shall remove and for ever exclude that misery, may be effected without the slightest injury to any human being.

Here is the groundwork,—these are the data, on which society shall ere long be re-arranged; and for this simple reason, that it will be rendered evident that it will be for the immediate and future interest of every one to lend his most active assistance gradually to reform society on this basis. I say gradually, for in that word the most important considerations are involved. Any sudden and coercive attempt which may be made to remove even misery from men will prove injurious rather than beneficial. Their minds must be gradually prepared by an essential alteration of the circumstances which surround them, for any great and important change and amelioration in their condition. They must be first convinced of their blindness: this cannot be effected, even among the least unreasonable, or those termed the best part of mankind, in their present state, without creating some degree of irritation. This irritation, must then be tranquillized before another step ought to be attempted; and a general conviction must be established of the truth of the principles on which the projected change is to be founded. Their introduction into practice will then become easy,—difficulties will vanish as we approach them,—and, afterwards, the desire

to see the whole system carried immediately into effect will exceed the means of putting it into execution.

The principles on which this practical system is founded are not new; separately, or partially united, they have been often recommended by the sages of antiquity, and by modern writers. But it is not known to me that they have ever been thus combined. Yet it can be demonstrated that it is only by their being *all brought into practice together* that they are to be rendered beneficial to mankind; and sure I am that this is the earliest period in the history of man when they could be successfully introduced into practice.

I do not intend to hide from you that the change will be great. "Old things shall pass away, and all shall become new."

But this change will bear no resemblance to any of the revolutions which have hitherto occurred. These have been alone calculated to generate and call forth all the evil passions of hatred and revenge: but that system which is now contemplated will effectually eradicate every feeling of irritation and ill will which exists among mankind. The whole proceedings of those who govern and instruct the world will be reversed. Instead of spending ages in telling mankind what they ought to think and how they ought to act, the instructors and governors of the world will acquire a knowledge that will enable them, in one generation, to apply the means which shall cheerfully induce each of those whom they control and influence, not only to think, but to act in such a manner as shall be best for himself and best for every human being. And yet this extraordinary result will take place without punishment or apparent force.

Under this system, before commands are issued it shall be known whether they can or cannot be obeyed. Men shall not be called upon to assent to doctrines and to dogmas which do not carry conviction to their minds. They shall not be taught that merit can exist in doing, or that demerit can arise from not doing that over which they have no control. They shall not be told, at present, that they must love that which, by the constitution of their nature, they are compelled to dislike. They shall not be trained in wild imaginary notions, that inevitably make them despise and hate all mankind out of the little narrow circle in which they exist, and then be told that they must heartily and sincerely love all their fellow-men. No, my friends, that system which shall make its way into the heart of every man, is founded upon principles which have not the slightest resemblance to any of those I have alluded to. On the contrary, it is directly opposed to them; and the effects it will produce in practice will differ as much from the practice which history records, and from that which we see around us, as hypocrisy, hatred, envy, revenge, wars, poverty, injustice, oppression, and all their consequent misery, differ from that genuine charity and sincere kindness of which we perpetually hear, but which we have never seen, and which, under the existing systems, we never can see.

That charity and that kindness admit of no exception. They extend to every child of man, however he may have been taught, however he may have been trained. They consider not what country gave him birth, what may be his complexion, what his habits or his sentiments. Genuine charity and true kindness instruct, that whatever these may be, should they prove the very reverse of what we have been taught to think right and best, our conduct towards him, our sentiments with respect to him, should undergo no change; for, when we shall see things as they really are, we shall know that this our fellow-man has undergone the same kind of process and training from infancy which we have experienced; that he has been as effectually taught to deem his sentiments and actions right, as we have been to imagine ours right and his wrong; when perhaps the only difference is, that we were born in one country, and he in another. If this be not

true, then indeed are all our prospects hopeless; then fierce contentions, poverty, and vice, must continue for ever. Fortunately, however, there is now a superabundance of facts to remove all doubt from every mind; and the principles may now be fully developed, which will easily explain the source of all the opinions which now perplex and divide the world; and their source being discovered, mankind may withdraw all those which are false and injurious, and prevent any evil from arising in consequence of the varieties of sentiments, or rather of feelings, which may afterwards remain.

In short, my friends, the New System is founded on principles which will enable mankind to *prevent*, in the rising generation, almost all, if not all of the evils and miseries which we and our forefathers have experienced. A correct knowledge of human nature will be acquired; ignorance will be removed; the angry passions will be prevented from gaining any strength; charity and kindness will universally prevail; poverty will not be known; the interest of each individual will be in strict unison with the interest of every individual in the world. There will not be any counteraction of wishes and desires among men. Temperance and simplicity of manners will be the characteristics of every part of society. The natural defects of the few will be amply compensated by the increased attention and kindness towards them of the many. None will have cause to complain; for each will possess, without injury to another, all that can tend to his comfort, his well-being, and his happiness.—Such will be the certain consequences of the introduction into practice of that system for which I have been silently preparing the way for upwards of five-and-twenty years.

Still, however, much more preparation is necessary, and must take place, before the whole can be introduced. It is not intended to put it into practice here. The establishment was too far advanced on the old system before I came amongst you, to admit of its introduction, except to a limited extent. All I now purpose doing in this place is, to introduce as many of the advantages of the new system as can be put into practice in connexion with the old: but these advantages will be neither few nor of little amount. I hope, ere long, even under the existing disadvantages, to give you and your children far more solid advantages for your labour, than any persons similarly circumstanced have yet enjoyed at any time or in any part of the world.

Nor is this all. When you and your children shall be in the full possession of all that I am preparing for you, you will acquire superior habits; your minds will gradually expand; you will be enabled to judge accurately of the cause and consequences of my proceedings, and to estimate them at their value. You will then become desirous of living in a more perfect state of society, —a society which will possess within itself the certain means of preventing the existence of any injurious passions, poverty, crime, or misery; in which every individual shall be instructed, add his powers of body and mind directed, by the wisdom derived from the best previous experience, so that neither bad habits nor erroneous sentiments shall be known;—in which age shall receive attention and respect, and in which every injurious distinction shall be avoided,—even variety of opinions shall not create disorder or any unpleasant feeling;—a society in which individuals shall acquire increased health, strength, and intelligence,—in which their labour shall be always advantageously directed,—and in which they will possess every rational enjoyment.

In due time communities shall be formed possessing such characters, and be thrown open to those among you, and to individuals of every class and denomination, whose wretched habits and whose sentiments of folly have not been too deeply impressed to be obliterated or removed, and whose minds can be sufficiently relieved from the pernicious effects of the old system, to

permit them to partake of the happiness of the new. (The communities alluded to shall be more particularly described in a future publication.)

Having delivered this strange discourse, for to many of you it must appear strange indeed, I conceive only one of two conclusions can be drawn by those who have heard it. These are,— that the world to this day has been grossly wrong, and is at this moment in the depth of ignorance ;—or, that I am completely in error. The chances then, you will say, are greatly against me. True: but the chances have been equally against every individual who has been enabled to make any discovery whatsoever.

To effect the purposes which I have long silently meditated, my proceedings for years have been so far removed from, or rather so much in opposition to, the common practices of mankind, that not a few have concluded I was insane. Such conjectures were favourable to my purposes, and I did not wish to contradict them. But the question of insanity between the world and myself will now be decided; either they have been rendered greatly insane,— or I am so. You have witnessed my conduct and measures here for sixteen years; and the objects I have had in progress are so far advanced that you can now comprehend many of them. You, therefore, shall be judges in this case. Insanity is inconsistency. Let us now try the parties by this rule.

From the beginning I firmly proposed to ameliorate your condition, the condition of all those engaged in similar occupations, and, ultimately, the condition of mankind, whose situation appeared to me most deplorable. Say, now, as far as you know, did I not adopt judicious measures to accomplish these purposes?

Have I not calmly, steadily, and patiently proceeded to fill up the outline of the plan which I originally formed to overcome your worst habits and greatest inconveniences, as well as your prejudices? Have not the several parts of this plan, as they were finished, fulfilled most completely the purposes for which they were projected? Are you not at this moment deriving the most substantial benefits from them? Have I in the slightest degree injured any one of you? During the progress of these measures have I not been opposed in the most determined and formidable manner by those whose interests, if they had understood them, would have made them active co-operators? Without any apparent means to resist these attempts, were they not frustrated and overcome, and even the resistance itself rendered available to hasten the execution of all my wishes? In short, have I not been enabled, with one hand, to direct with success the common mercantile concerns of this extensive establishment, and with the other hand to direct measures which now seem more like national than private ones, in order to introduce another system, the effects and success of which shall astonish the profound theologian no less than the most experienced and fortunate politician ?—a system which shall train its children of twelve years old to surpass, in true wisdom and knowledge, the boasted acquirements of modern learning, of the sages of antiquity, of the founders of all those systems – which hitherto have only confused and distracted the world, and which have been the immediate cause of almost all the miseries we now deplore?

Being witnesses of my measures, you alone are competent to judge of their consistency. Under these circumstances it would be mere hypocrisy in me to say that I do not know what must be your conclusions.

During the long period in which I have been thus silently acting for your benefit and for the benefit of each of my fellowmen,—what has been the conduct of the world?

Having maturely contemplated the past actions of men, as they have been made known to us by history, it became necessary for my purpose that I should become practically acquainted with

men as they now are, and acquire from inspection a knowledge of the precise effects produced in the habits and sentiments of each class, by the peculiar circumstances with which the individuals were surrounded. The causes which had previously prepared my mind and disposition for the work,—which had removed so many formidable difficulties in the early part of my progress, now smoothed the way to the easy attainment of my wishes. By the knowledge of human nature which I had already acquired, I was enabled to dive into the secret recesses of a sufficient number of minds of the various denominations forming British society, to discover the immediate causes of the sentiments of each, and to trace the consequences of the actions that necessarily proceeded from those sentiments. The whole, as though they had been delineated on a map, were laid open to me. Shall I now at this eventful crisis make the world known to itself? Or shall this valuable knowledge descend with me to the grave, and you, our fellow-men, and our children's children, through many generations, yet suffer the miseries which the inhabitants of the earth have to this day experienced? These questions, however, need not be asked. My resolutions were taken in early life; and subsequent years have added to their strength and confirmed them. I therefore proceed regardless of individual consequences. I will hold up the mirror to man,—show him, without the intervention of any false medium, what he is, and then he will be better prepared to learn what he may be. Man is so constituted, that, by the adoption of proper measures in his infancy, and by steadily pursuing them through all the early periods of his life to manhood, he may be taught to think and to act in any manner that is not beyond the acquirement of his faculties: whatever he may have been thus taught to think and to do, he may be effectually made to believe is right and best for all mankind. He may also be taught (however few may think and act as he does), that all those who differ from him are wrong, and even ought to be punished with death if they will not think and act like him. In short, he may be rendered insane upon every subject which is not founded on, and which does not remain in never-varying consistency with, the facts that surround mankind. It is owing to this peculiarity in the constitution of man, that when he is born he may be taught any of the various dogmas which are known, and be rendered wholly unfit to associate with any of his fellow-men who have been trained in any of the other dogmas. It is owing to this principle that a poor human being duly initiated in the mysteries of Juggernaut, is thereby rendered insane on everything regarding that monster. Or, when instructed in the dogmas of Mahomedanism, he is thus rendered insane on every subject which has reference to Mahomed. I might proceed and state the same of those poor creatures who have been trained in the tenets of Brahma, or Confucius, or in any other of those systems which serve only to destroy the human intellect.

I have no doubt, my friends, you are at present convinced, as thoroughly as conviction can be formed in your minds, that none of you have been subjected to any such process;—that you have been instructed in that which is true;—that is evident. Pagans, Jews, Turks, every one of them, millions upon millions almost without end, are wrong, fundamentally wrong. Nay, you will allow, also, that they are truly as insane as I have stated them to be. But you will add,—” We are right,—we are the favoured of Heaven,—we are enlightened, and cannot be deceived.” This is the feeling of every one of you at this moment. I need not be told your thoughts. Shall I now pay regard to you or to myself? Shall I be content and rest satisfied with the sufficiency which has fallen to my lot, while you remain in your ignorance and misery? Or shall I sacrifice every private consideration for the benefit of you and our fellow-men? Shall I tell you, and the whole of the civilized world, that, in many respects, none of these have been rendered more insane



than yourselves,—than every one of you is at this moment; and that while these maladies remain uncured, you and your posterity cannot but exist in the midst of folly and misery?

What think you now, my friends, is the reason why you believe and act as you do? I will tell you. It is solely and merely because you were born, and have lived, in this period of the world,—in Europe,—in the island of Great Britain,—and more especially in this northern part of it. Without the shadow of a doubt, had every one of you been born in other times or other places, you might have been the very reverse of that which the present time and place have made you: and, without the possibility of the slightest degree of assent or dissent on your own parts, you might have been at this moment sacrificing yourselves under the wheels of the great idol Juggernaut, or preparing a victim for a cannibal feast. This, upon reflection, will be found to be a truth as certain as that you now hear my voice.

Will you not, then, have charity for the habits and opinions of all men, of even the very worst human beings that your imaginations can conceive? Will you not, then, be sincerely kind to them, and actively endeavour to do them good? Will you not patiently bear with, and commiserate, their defects and infirmities, and consider them as your relatives and friends?

If you will not,—if you cannot do this, and persevere to the end of your days in doing it,—you have not charity; you cannot have religion; you possess not even common justice; you are ignorant of yourselves, and are destitute of every particle of useful and valuable knowledge respecting human nature.

Until you act after this manner, it is impossible that you can ever enjoy full happiness yourselves, or make others happy.

Herein consists the essence of philosophy ;—of sound morality; —of true and genuine Christianity, freed from the errors that that been attached to it ;—of pure and undefiled religion.

Without the introduction of this knowledge into full and complete practice, there can be no substantial and permanent ameliorations effected in society; and I declare to you, that until all your thoughts and actions are founded on and governed by these principles, your philosophy will be vain,—your morality baseless, —your Christianity only calculated to mislead and deceive the weak and the ignorant,—and your professions of religion but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

Those, therefore, who with singleness of heart and mind are ardently desirous to benefit their fellow-men, will put forth their utmost exertions to bring this just and humane system of conduct forthwith into practice, and to extend the knowledge of its endless advantages to the uttermost parts of the earth ;—*for no other principles of action can ever become universal among men!*

Your time now makes it necessary that I should draw to a conclusion, and explain what ought to be the immediate result of what I have stated.

Direct your serious attention to the cause why men think and act as they do. You will then be neither surprised nor displeased on account of their sentiments or their habits. You will then clearly discover why others are displeased with you,—and pity them. As you proceed in these inquiries, you will find that mankind cannot be improved or rendered reasonable by force and contention; that it is absolutely necessary to support the old systems and institutions under which we now live, until another system and another arrangement of society shall be proved by practice to be essentially superior. You will, therefore, still regard it as your duty to pay respect and submission to what is established. For it would be no mark of wisdom to desert an old house, whatever may be its imperfections, until a new one shall be ready to receive you, however superior to the old that new one may be when finished.

Continue to obey the laws under which you live; and although many of them are founded on principles of the grossest ignorance and folly, yet obey them,—until the government of the country (which I have reason to believe is in the hands of men well disposed to adopt a system of general improvement) shall find it practicable to withdraw those laws which are productive of evil, and introduce others of an opposite tendency.

With regard to myself, I have not anything to ask of you, which I have not long experienced. I wish you merely to think that I am ardently engaged in endeavouring to benefit you and your children, and, through you and them, to render to mankind at large great and permanent advantages. I ask not for your gratitude, your love, your respect; for on you these do not depend. Neither do I seek or wish for praise or distinction of any kind; for to these, upon the clearest conviction, I am not entitled, and to me, therefore, they could be of no value. My desire is only to be considered as one of yourselves,—as a cotton spinner going about his daily and necessary avocations.

But for you I have other wishes. On this day a new era opens to our view. Let it then commence by a full and sincere dismissal from your minds of every unpleasant feeling which you may entertain towards each other, or towards any of your fellow-men. When you feel these injurious dispositions beginning to arise,—for, as you have been trained and are now circumstanced, they will arise again and again,—instantly call to your recollection how the minds of such individuals have been formed,—whence have originated all their habits and sentiments: your anger will then be appeased; you will calmly investigate the cause of your differences, and you will learn to love them and to do them good. A little perseverance in this simple and easily acquired practice will rapidly prepare the way for you, and every one around you, to be truly happy.

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Robert Owen  
An Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark  
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